

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Cosby Conviction

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Following a four-day trial in U.S. District Court, a jury convicted Johnny Carl Grooms of Cosby, Tennessee, of conspiring to distribute oxycodone and cocaine, interstate travel to further drug trafficking, possession of oxycodone with the intent to distribute, distribution of cocaine, possession of firearms by a convicted felon, and illegally trafficking in ginseng. Grooms's sentencing is set for October 3, and he faces up to life in prison as well as fines of over \$8 million.

I spoke of Grooms's arrest earlier, but with his trial and conviction, new light has been shed on his activities. In the fall of 2008, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service received reports that Grooms was illegally trafficking in wild American ginseng, a protected plant.

An undercover Fish & Wildlife Service special agent contacted Grooms about ginseng, which ended up shedding light on Grooms's drug trafficking efforts, including how he sponsored people to travel to Florida to get prescription drugs. Through the course of the undercover work, Grooms sold the special agent an ounce of cocaine, and delivered multiple pounds of wild ginseng. Tennessee state law requires ginseng dealers have a permit and keep records of their sales – neither of which had been done by Grooms. Grooms also sold ginseng that had been collected from Great Smoky Mountains National Park, a violation of federal law.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.